EC&I 809 Reading Response #2 – Chapters 1 & 2

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**What is the purpose of evaluation and how does it serve society?**

* Evaluation uses inquiry and judgment methods which include: determining standards for judging quality, gathering relevant information, applying the standards to determine value, quality, utility and effectiveness
* Evaluation is necessary for administrators, program managers and policy makers to make informed decisions about effectiveness of programs.
* Brings about “social betterment”

**What is the difference between informal and formal evaluation? How do they differ from research?**

* Informal evaluations can examine effectiveness but also lead to faulty judgments. They are characterized by “an absence of breadth and depth” because they lack formally collected evidence. They can be influenced by instinct, experience and generalizations. Formal evaluations are more structured and thorough.
* Evaluation differs from research: - evaluation – questions come from many sources such as stakeholders, not just the evaluator
* Evaluations are judged by their accuracy, utility, feasibility and propriety versus research is judged by causality (internal validity) and external validity (comparisons to other settings and other times)
* Evaluators develop and establish personal working relationships with clients

**What are the roles and duties of professional evaluators? What are the advantages/disadvantages of internal vs. external evaluations?**

* Help practitioners develop critical judgment and bring about program development or change
* Roles depend on the context of the evaluation but include: critical friend, facilitator, collaborator, teacher, management consultant, and social-change agent
* Develop dialogue between groups involved, including stakeholders
* Help articulate program theories or logic models
* Activities include: define purpose of evaluation, in discussion with stakeholders, developing contracts, hiring and supervising staff, managing budgets, identifying disenfranchised or underrepresented groups, working with advisory panels, collecting, analyzing, interpreting information, write reports and disseminate information
* Internal: Advantages (know more about the program and people involved in it and their decision making styles) Disadvantages (too close to the program and may have biases)
* External: Advantages (perceived as more credible to the public, provide a degree of autonomy, usually a hired specialist)

**What is the difference between formative and summative evaluation and their roles?**

* Formative evaluation’s purpose: provide information for improvement and strengthening of a program usually at the initial stages(ex. Collect information via surveys, focus groups, interviews)
  + Audience is comprised mainly of the people delivering the program
* Summative evaluation’s purpose: provide information to assist in decision making about program implementation, continuation or expansion (decisions about the overall value of the program) usually at the later stages
  + Audience is comprised of potential users, funding sources, policy makers or administrators

**What are potential limitations of evaluation?**

* Evaluation cannot solve all the problems of society and may not be attainable
* Fail to lead to significant improvements in the program
* Too little understanding about other factors that affect the use of the evaluation information
* Tendency to view evaluation as a series of discrete studies rather than a continuing system of self-renewal

**How has history shaped and influenced evaluation?**

* Evaluation can be traced back as far as 200 B.C. with early Chinese civil service exams
* 1800’s - Dissatisfaction with education and social programs led to reform movements by external inspectorates
* 1840’s – first instance of school comparisons made on student achievement to assess quality
* Late 1800’s – Rice conducted the first comparative studies in education aimed to provide information on the quality of instructional methods
* Early 1900’s – educational testing gained momentum with the advent of technology
  + Evaluation was being developed in fields such as human services and the private sector focusing on systemization and efficiency
  + These isolated and small scale activities had little impact
* 1940’s – government programs were developed intending to help military personnel but the studies focused on areas of interest of the researchers involved
* 1950’s – after the launch of Sputnik, the US spent millions to develop new curriculum projects in math and science – led to inadequate designs and irrelevant reports
* 1965 – ESEA – responsible for the emergence of our modern program evaluations, proposed huge increases on federal funding, led to the mandate of evaluation reports in order to secure funding
* 1960’s – 1980’s – need for accountability and specialists, evaluators begin to consider information needs of managers and unintended outcomes, publications produced, development of standards to judge the quality of education
* 1985 – Present – many approaches and methods being used, mandates for program improvement and accountability, in-service evaluation training
* Emerging trends – increasing priority and legitimacy of internal evaluation, use of qualitative methods, concern over ethical issues, involvement of stakeholders, advances in technology

As a teacher, the topic of evaluation has been forefront in my work over the past year. I have done some research in my previous grad class, as well as while teaching the EMTH 350 class at the university, with types of evaluations and rationale for what is to be assessed. I guess what I still struggle with is one of the limitations mentioned in the reading – that being that evaluation does not lead to significant changes and/or improvement. It is easy to get into a rut of seeing evaluation as a “series of discrete studies rather than a continuing system of self-renewal.” I don’t see any difference between me as a teacher performing evaluations in my classroom or an administration completing an evaluation on the merits of continuing a program. If no effort is made to improve and make changes as a result of the evaluation, what is the point of it?

Over the past twelve years, I have taught in both the federal and provincial education systems. I have had firsthand experience with evaluations done by internal and external evaluators. Although the person hired was competent in her job, I have felt much more comfortable being evaluated in my classroom by someone who knows me and the environment in which I teach. I have questions as to why a school board would want to have an external evaluator make evaluations on a teacher for one or perhaps two lessons on a particular day. Who decides what makes them competent to make decisions about how “good of a job” someone else is doing when they may not necessarily be trained in that field? I question this because, in my role at the university, I had the opportunity to observe my third-year students during their pre-internship. As a newcomer to their teaching environment, I would hardly say that I would be the most appropriate person to make decisions or evaluations about their teaching after just one hour of observation.

Education seems to lend itself to evaluation. As far back as the 1840’s schools have been involved in comparisons and utmost accountability. I see our school involved in several provincial and national assessments over the course of a school year. Today, much money is devoted to these programs, as it was during the 1970’s. I do however see to a certain extent, other than the look at meeting curriculum objectives and student achievement, more focus is being placed on assessment “for” learning rather than on assessment “of” learning. As an educator, I can’t help to wonder how our roles will change with the newest curriculum renewal and the continuing development of technology.